CULTURAL HAUNTINGS: TRANSCENDING GHOSTS, SPIRITS AND LITERARY GENRES

by

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In this thesis, I explore the cultural haunting genre by examining works by LeAnne Howe, Li-Young Lee, and Monique Truong. This project looks to further define and expand the cultural haunting genre to include all of the cultural haunting, including those narratives that do not necessarily rely on ghosts as a master metaphor. The story of cultural haunting up to this point has mainly focused on an author's use of ghosts, which serve to link the past with the present and signal an attempt to recover and make known something muffled or partially erased throughout cultural history. I begin this project by exploring the first type of haunting—theorized by Kathleen Brogan—in LeAnne Howe's novel *Miko Kings* (2007) and then moving on to what I call a state of hauntedness in Truong's and Lee's works. In Chapters Two and Three, I examine this state of hauntedness, its causes, and the heavy weight the haunting has on Truong and Lee. By reviewing literary works that include similar culturally haunted elements, as defined by Brogan and Avery Gordon, I propose to expand the definition of cultural haunting to include works that do not involve ghost figures. In addition, by examining Li-Young Lee's poetry and his state of hauntedness, my study also shows how the cultural haunting motif transcends different types of literary genres.

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DEDICATION

This is dedicated to everyone who has experienced a traumatic event and felt this state of hauntedness.

This is also dedicated to my wife, Miranda, my oldest son Nicholas, my daughter Elizabeth and my youngest son, Andrew.

Finally, I dedicate this to my father, who passed away many years ago, and yet in some ways, his spirit is still felt by his loved ones even today.

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INTRODUCTION

Cultural Trauma, Memories, The Haunted, Ghosts, and Their Voices

In this thesis, I look to reconsider what is considered a cultural haunting by examining works by LeAnne Howe, Li-Young Lee, and Monique Truong. In recent years, the identification of cultural haunting typically includes ghosts or spirits that are used to "reflect the increased emphasis on ethnic and racial differentiation in all social groups" (Brogan 4). Looking at the cultural haunting genre further, these ghosts have been carrying a powerful message of these injustices by reconstructing an ethnic identity for those that suffered traumas at the hands of others. Although there is no question of how powerful the use of these ghosts can be in multicultural literature, it is essential to review what should be considered within this genre. In recent years, it has been suggested that the cultural haunting genre is practically narrow, and expanding it to include other genres may "gain precisely the conceptual sharpness it needs" (Weisenburger 816). This thesis project will look to show how these ghosts are used within Howe's novel, then move to show what I call a state of hauntedness within Truong's and Lee's works. Often the word haunted is defined as either a person being frequently "visited by ghosts" or the appearance that someone shows "signs of suffering or severe anxiety" ("Haunted," def. A.1-2). Finally, this thesis will also propose possible causes of this state of hauntedness within each work examined.

Multicultural literature is a haunted space, where the narrative pushes the "boundaries of language and thought" (Davis 379). Colin Davis suggests that hauntology is often a direct effort to raise the "stakes of literary study, to make it a place where we can interrogate our relation to the dead, examine the elusive identities of the living, and explore the boundaries between the thought and the unthought" (379). This genre is not only haunted by voices from ghosts from the

past, it is also haunted by the living. With every passing day, these voices change the way cultures view topics concerning race, ethnicity, religion, and gender. As more of these multicultural works are created, it is allowing humanity to uncover the injustices experienced by these underrepresented and oppressed voices. Within this haunted space, traumatic events pour over every page, allowing the reader to see a more accurate view of the world they live in. It is these voices of the haunted that manufacture this space where ghosts from the past and the living are altering mainstream views and fighting back against these cultural flaws.

These multicultural ghosts often fall within Gothic literature. Gothic is a popular form for a vehicle of class criticism and an opportunity for discussing cultural traumas resulting from colonization, war, forced assimilation, and suppression of cultural aspects that are important to the victim. An example of a multicultural ghost story is Maxine Hong Kingston's book *The Woman Warrior (1976)*. Kingston's book hints that her past experiences uniquely haunt her due to being an Asian American negotiating cultures. The short story "No Name Woman" suggests that instead of physically murdering her aunt "as punishment, the family forcefully suppresses the linguistic representation of her name, dehumanizing her" and leaves the aunt no choice but to take her own life (Parrott 378). Kingston writes her aunt back into existence by allowing her aunt's suppressed voice to be heard, bringing her back to life as a ghost, haunting the narrative and her family ever since it was published. As Kingston's example suggests, multicultural ghost stories include some Gothic literary elements, including anxiety, darkness, paranoia, innocent victims, ghosts, and the feeling of being haunted by the trauma from an extreme event within a character's lifetime or passed on throughout generations.

Each of these works throughout this thesis that I will examine will link how each piece of literature shows this state of hauntedness and how it stems from the character's or author's need

to deal with traumatic events or memories within their lifetime. Chris Brewin suggests that traumatic memories are like autobiographical memories, which are likely to be remembered "if they are part of a shared social experience or have personal consequences" (2). As trauma theories are being further defined, it is critical to look at how this relates to multicultural literature and how this can influence the overall message that these stories are trying to convey. One of those highly debated topics within some trauma theories is how critics often point to the difference between individual and collective trauma. Christa Schönfelder claims that literature has shown that "individual trauma cannot be separated from its collective dimensions" (39). While this may or may not be accurate, it is critical to consider how at first glance a character's trauma may at first seem like an individual trauma. However, upon further reflection, the critic can point to how this event led to other traumas that could be considered part of what is often considered or labeled as part of more substantial collective trauma.

The process of dealing with traumatic events within someone's lifetime can be painful. If the traumatic experiences are repressed and not dealt with, these can remain in the unconscious mind and "resurface in the form of disturbing symptoms" (Visser 273). When looking at the effect of trauma on a person, Irene Visser suggests these traumatic memories "intrude repetitively on everyday" life and can include symptoms which "may appear chronically or intermittently" for weeks or months or even several years after the event(s) (272). Traumatic events can result in symptoms that can include not only nightmares, flashbacks, showing signs of "depression, but also increased sensitivity to cynicism, depersonalization, and distinct changes in spirituality or worldview" (Visser 272). Cathy Caruth is another scholar whose work has further defined how trauma is viewed and interpreted. Caruth's research proposes that in some cases, "trauma is not experienced as it occurs" but becomes "fully evident only in connection with

another place, and in another time" (18). Caruth's assertion suggests that people deal with traumatic experiences, not just when they happen, but instead, these experiences haunt each person until they die or until they bring that which haunts them under their personal control.

One of the forefront leaders in the study of cultural haunting is Kathleen Brogan and her book *Cultural Haunting: Ghosts and Ethnicity in Recent American Literature* (1998). Brogan's research proposes that ghosts function to "re-create ethnic identity through an imaginative recuperation of the past and to press this version of the past into the service of the present" (4). Brogan is quick to point out that these ghosts are not "supernatural" in nature, but the mind's process of dealing with, in most cases, a traumatic experience, such as "deaths of family members, or acts of racial persecution" (6). Another leading scholar within the cultural haunting genre is Avery Gordon and her book *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (1997). Gordon suggests that "haunting and the appearance of specters or ghosts is one way" that literature shows what has been concealed but is very much alive and present (xvi). Gordon infers that it is this state of hauntedness that allows for the author the domain to present the accurate account of what caused the trauma and thus assigning a place where "the cracks and rigging are exposed" and allowing the invisible to become visible (xvi). It is this deep dive within that fuels the fire for this recreation process, using these ghosts in a way to show the trauma endured by historical oppressions or traumatic events in a person's lifetime.

As I progress through this thesis, I will illustrate how within multicultural literature, there are different ways that authors use the theme of the haunted within their works. The first type of haunting goes along with Brogan's suggestion that the haunting is provided by the ancestral ghost, guiding the story's characters, helping them reconstruct the character's or the group's ethnic identity that was lost or not fully understood by the novel's characters. Gish Jen's novel

The Love Wife (2004) exemplifies Brogan's definition of a cultural haunting ghost and highlights the complexity and the reality of a multiracial family living within America. Su-ching Huang proposes that Mama Wong's character "can be read as such a ghostly presence in *The Love Wife*"; she reminds the haunted, namely her son Carnegie, of the Chinese immigrant past, one that is bound to be forgotten if he does not make a conscious effort to remember it (345). Jen recreates Mama Wong's ancestral voice, bringing the departed back to life, allowing her to bring the family in the process "diverse concepts of race and culture to their American home" (Chu 48). Jen creates this ghostly element by intermittently having Carnegie reflect on what his mother would say about something within his life. While in the hospital, Mama Wong's ghostly presence is culminated with her visiting Carnegie after his heart attack, and this can be seen during the following narration:

> Fluids in, fluids out, intake, outtake, meds, and nurses, meds and doctors, visitors and dreams, all I could think was, I suppose I really am no longer young, to which Mama Wong said, Young! Of course not young, how could you be young! But you never grow up either! That's how I know I brought you up Chinese and still you grow up American. Mom! I said. You're better. Of course I'm better, what did you think? I was going to stay an idiot forever? Mom, I said. I had my heart attack. I got attacked by my heart. Your heart was always problem, she said. From the beginning I say so- no drive, number one. Number two, have to rescue everyone. Even I am died, look how you try to rescue me. For what? What kind of joke is that? (374)

While Mama Wong's ghost tries to reconnect a piece of Carnegie that may have been lost, not all authors use ghosts to reestablish an ethnic identity. Within Multicultural literature, these ghosts also often serve to emphasize the void the characters live within and how this

influences their state of hauntedness. An example of this is Jamaica Kincaid's *The Autobiography of My Mother* (1996), in which Kincaid creates a ghostly haunting element with Xuela sporadically experiencing dreams of her dead mother. Xuela's mother died giving birth, and this disconnection between the two suggests that Xuela's mind cannot move past her not being in her life. As Xuela admits, "my mother dying at the moment I was born became a central motif of my life" (225). This constant reminder forces the character's mind to conjure up what was lost. Xuela, a postcolonial subject and an orphan for parts of the story, is forced to construct her identity via "loss, destruction, and death of the mother/land" (Alexander 113). Xuela, without her mother, is forced to find solace within the homes of strangers or within her father's home, where she is considered an outsider. Without a caring loved one, she is left in this void, leading her to endure traumatic experience after traumatic experience. It is this haunting space where she was abused that led her to no other choice but to take her unborn child's life. Xuela's life is only further traumatized by slavery and colonialism's effect on the culture around her, resulting in traumas, injuries, and scars caused by side effects of European colonialization of the Caribbean islands. Kincaid's ghostly haunting provides a despairing and glooming message that Xuela has no control over her future and will end up just like her mother, haunted by her memories until her last breath.

Some scholars have criticized that "Brogan's effort to establish a new literary genre may strike some as narrow"; some critics are questioning whether it should be expanded to include other elements to further drive home the cultural haunting genre (Engles n.p.). Brogan's idea of cultural haunting suggests that the story has a "master metaphor" of a ghost that is the go-between and "which moves between the past and present" (Brogan 6). Gordon has much of the same view suggesting haunting creates these ghosts that "alters the experience of being in time,

the way we separate the past, the present, and the future" (*Ghostly Matters* xvi). The connections between Brogan's and Gordon's books provide some definition of the cultural haunting genre. However, they could be expanded to further understand the different types of uses of these ghosts and consider the second definition of "haunted," which is defined as the appearance that someone shows "signs of suffering or severe anxiety" ("Haunted," def. A.1-2).

Brogan's definition of what should be considered as cultural haunting relies on the author bringing "the dead back to life" to challenge historical events as a way to reconstruct the past, and create an alternate history by incorporating "unheard or suppressed stories" of the victims (17). It is crucial to consider that many people deal with this state of hauntedness and how writers often speak from their "own hauntedness to the hauntedness in others" (Phillips 69). As Kincaid's novel insinuates, these ghosts do not always help recreate what was lost, but simply emphasize the continual state of being haunted. With that said, I suggest that it is crucial not only to consider the voices of these ghosts and how they recreate this space, but it is also vital to hear the voices of the "haunted" as well. I propose that this state of hauntedness can present an alternative way of viewing the cultural haunting genre and give it the conceptual sharpness it deserves.

As stated earlier, traumatic memories cause these thoughts to hover over a character and haunt the narrative. One author that dives into what drives people to write and this state of hauntedness is Carl Phillips. A world-renowned writer and poet, Phillips provides critical insight into this recurring theme throughout Gothic literature. In his book, *The Art of Daring: Risk, Restlessness, Imagination* (2014), Phillips describes this state of hauntedness and how, as each person ages, they, in a way, will become uniquely haunted by memories from past events. Phillips takes the audience along on a journey to understand how life and art are combined using

risk, restlessness, and imagination. In this process, the reader and author can use it to make sense of the world around them and, in some way, come to terms with it. Phillips suggests that as each person goes through life, it is "human impulse to give shapelessness a form," and it is this process that "is the catalyst for the particular field of inquiry that we call art" (Phillips 64). However, in the case of these cultural haunting stories, this state of hauntedness leaves the victims in a state of unrest, reminding them constantly of the traumatic event.

Another example of this type of haunting is Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), which paints a picture of how both female characters Antoinette and her mother are uniquely haunted by their past experiences within the void between the natives of the Dominican and the European colonizers. Antoinette is described as a "white" Creole by Rhys and this further complicates her relationships with those around her as a child and as an adult. Upon arriving at the convent, she is quickly picked on by a native child that suggests that Antoinette looks like a "crazy girl," just like her mother (45). Later in the story, her husband, Rochester, seems to be infatuated with her upon meeting her. It is not until he receives a letter from Daniel Cosway that he starts to believe in all the accounts of his wife's "madness," and that is the starting point leading the couple to drift apart as the story progresses (88).

When it comes to this state of hauntedness, I believe it is critical within multicultural literature to reflect on how we label these characters who have experienced horrifying traumatic events within their lifetime. Since its publication, Rhys's novel provides a critical link to how often the critic will label Antoinette's character as "mad" instead of considering Antoinette's character as dealing with this possible state of hauntedness. As Mona Fayad astutely observes, it could be interpreted that Antoinette finally wakes up from the dreams and finds her path to her own freedom. As people move through life and have time for further reflection, the researcher

will often see a different way of viewing the world we live in, and how it is critical to reconsider claims of "madness" when criticizing multiple point of view stories.

In Chapter One, I will introduce the first type of ghost as described by Brogan by exploring LeAnne Howe's novel *Miko Kings* (2007). Within Howe's novel, the reader witnesses the use of this type of ghost outlined by Brogan and Gordon with Ezol Day's character. I will then move to point out how the reader will also find this state of hauntedness within Lena Coulter's character, who is a Choctaw descendant of Ms. Day. Howe's novel uses a ghost named Ezol Day, who has unlocked the secrets of time and space to help Lena re-create her ethnic identity all the while learning about what happened to the Miko King's baseball team players and those around them all those years ago. This chapter begins by exploring the Choctaw nation and its people's struggles during the time of European colonization. It is within this space that Howe's novel reveals the complexity of ancient trade relationships between the Indigenous population and what they endured due to the European colonial powers arriving in the Americas. This novel and its characters will also provide insight into how the European settlement created many different traumas on these Choctaw characters portrayed in this novel and how they are still manifesting within human societies even today.

In Chapter Two, I will develop and describe how cultural hauntings transcend the use of ghosts. This chapter will focus on Truong's novel *Bitter in the Mouth* (2010) to illustrate how the main character, Linda, is uniquely haunted by her experience growing up in North Carolina. One of the main factors that lead to Linda's state of hauntedness is revealed in the second half of the novel, titled "Revelation," in which the reader learns that Linda was adopted. This disconnection to her past forces Linda to search for identity within a book about North Carolina's historical people. These ghosts from North Carolina's past do not help Linda find her identity but instead

serve to “further emphasize her own sense of invisibility of being in a void” (Price 59). Linda's identity is still unclear at the end of the novel, and it is not until the silence is broken that Linda starts the healing process. The lack of ethnic identity and her traumatic childhood experiences will directly correlate to Howe's main character, Lena, from the previous chapter.

Chapter Three will look at Lee’s book *The City in Which I Love You* (1990) as an example of the state of hauntedness, and the need to deal with these traumas. When considering works that fall within the cultural haunting genre, I will propose how it is critical to explore how poetry and other genres show the same themes as those pointed out by Brogan and Gordon. Jacqueline Kolosov claims that Lee’s poems show him to be “a compassionate witness and participant because he views time and identity as multifaceted and inter-connected” (55). It is essential to understand how Lee takes this deep dive into his Asian past, conjuring up the moments in time that lead up to the moment of understanding. Lee diving into his culture and past opens up a space to educate the reader on different Asian cultural aspects and allows the reader to see how this state of hauntedness fuels his writing process.

CHAPTER ONE

Choctaw's Ghosts Haunting the Past, Present, and Future:

LeAnne Howe's *Miko Kings*

Ghost stories have taken many shapes and have been part of popular literature for many centuries. Choctaw natives of the Mississippi valley have passed down this act of storytelling from generation to generation. Many Choctaw believe that there lie two spirits within each person, and it is these that waged war within each person. The first spirit is good, bringing "happiness and prosperity," while the other spirit is bad, inflicting "pain and misfortune" (Nephew and Bial 59). It is these spiritual beliefs that have fueled ghostly stories that have been told by Choctaw ancestors for over a thousand years. In recent years, these Choctaw ghost stories have taken on a new shape and are not those that have become increasingly popular in the nineteenth century. Within multicultural literature, these haunting stories are carrying a much more important message for the world. In this genre, these ghosts spotlight the injustices and reconstruct an ethnic identity for those who suffered traumas at the hands of others. In *Miko Kings* (2007), LeAnne Howe, a Choctaw descendant, uses the act of telling just as her ancestors did all those years ago. Howe's ghosts from the past haunt the narrative all the while reshaping and revealing the complexity of the relationships between southeastern Native people and the European invaders that took their lands all those years ago.

Choctaw nation during the colonial period fluctuated between a population of 10,000 and 15,000. With that amount of people, one should ask why the Choctaw or southeastern Native people's literary voice has been absent or silent for many years. Over the years, studies show how the Choctaw people were affected by the Europeans, the U.S. Government, and how forced assimilation affected them over the centuries. These studies point out that there are problems

involved in establishing an ethnic identity for the Choctaw people since it can be formidable to find many of their "archaeological components" of the historic past (Blitz 5). Blitz suggests that slowly what made up the Choctaw culture was gradually changed by the constant invasion by Europeans, and this can be seen in his narration:

> Through the influence of missionaries, traders, and the tide of settlers that invaded their lands after the War of 1812, Choctaw kinship structure changed from matrilineal to patrilineal (Eggan 1937:42). The moiety and clan system disappeared; moieties went first, but for a while, clan exogamy continued to be practiced (Swanton 1931:8J). By the early twentieth century, when anthropologists attempted to record further details, the original kinship structure was only a dim memory. (Blitz 19)

As the decades continue to pass, scholars believe there is a constant reminder that the historical loss is still affecting many Native American descendants. Les B. Whitbeck, Melissa L. Walls, Kurt D. Johnson, Allan D. Morrisseau, and Cindy M. McDougall suggest that many Native Americans today are "not fully recovered economically or socially from the military defeat and relocation" (19). Even after many years, Choctaw descendants continue to deal with intergenerational traumas. Lindsay Montgomery's study proposes that these Native American ghost stories are the result of manifestations of "suppressed psychological grief triggered by distressing events associated with American Colonization" (737). Montgomery's study claims that "although some tribal members believed that silence offered the best way of living with these ghosts, others conveyed a need to talk about America's violent past and to have this history recorded" (743). Both Montgomery's study and Howe's novel point to how many Native Americans still deal with these intergenerational traumas and how the act of storytelling can be an integral way to deal with this state of hauntedness.

Howe's *Miko Kings* creativity reveals the complexity of ancient trade relationships between Indigenous Natives and what they endured due to the European colonial powers arriving in the Americans. Howe's characters provide insight into how European settlement inflicted many different traumas on these Choctaw characters and how they are still manifesting within human societies even today. Kirstin Squint suggests that Howe uses her Choctaw characters to "literally time travel in her books, creating opportunities to overcome oppressive histories" (211). Howe's novels, and more specifically her ghosts, provide a relationship and a resource in understanding how these traumas persist well beyond the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It is this process that allows Indigenous Natives a voice. With this voice, Howe brings the dead into dialogue with the living, and it is their voice that forces the reader to hear their pain and allows a space for the traumatic experiences to be heard.

Howe's use of Choctaw spirits that cannot rest point to how memories themselves can become a curse, and when it comes to traumatic memories, these can haunt someone for the rest of their life. As a person ages, each person, in a way, will become uniquely haunted by memories from past events. However, in the case of these novels, this state of hauntedness leaves the victims in a state of unrest. Carl Phillips suggests that life is an endless cycle and how it is human nature to have "no satisfaction, no resting, and restlessness then becomes a state of hauntedness" (40). When looking at this state of hauntedness, Brogan claims that in Gothic literature, a reader may find that "ghosts function as plot device--providing crucial information, setting in motion the machinery of revenge or atonement" (2). One element that Indigenous Gothic adds to the Gothic literary space is how it often encourages characters to learn how to talk with ghosts, and it is this process of open dialogue and engagement with the dead that brings these characters back to life, manifesting a space to understand their pain and their message.

When looking at *Miko Kings*, this act of talking with ghosts happens between a female Choctaw spirit named Ezol Day and a modern-day freelance journalist and Choctaw descendant Lena Coulter. Lena's character, who is visited by Ezol multiple times throughout the story, has already had a problem with America, "especially its treatment of American Indians" (Howe 20). Howe provides a present-day haunting with how Lena struggles with the bombing that kills sixty people, including her dear friend Sayyed, in a terrorist attack in Amman, Jordan. This traumatic experience leads her back to her hometown, and eventually, she begins to remodel her Choctaw grandmother's old house. During the remodel process, Lena discovers Ezol's journal entries hidden away in one of the walls. Once the walls come down, Ezol somehow unlocks the secrets of moving through time and space, allowing her to provide her account of the traumatic events that happened all those years ago. Squint claims that Ezol is trapped in a way, and this comes from "the searing pain of loss, not only of one's beloved, but also of one's home, one's land, and one's way of life" (9). It is here that the audience will start to understand how Ezol's experiences uniquely haunted her and how her voice, just like other Native American voices, has been muffled or underrepresented throughout history.

Lena's struggles to understand or come to terms with past events within her lifetime show how essential it is to understand how trauma affects not only those who lived and experience the trauma personally but also the descendants of those who were initially disturbed. In the field of Psychiatry, Amy Bombay, Kimberly Matheson, and Hymie Anisman suggest that the "consequences of numerous and sustained attacks against a group" may continue to affect generations to come when it comes to historical trauma (320). The human mind is complex, and even today, many scientists still struggle to understand how the brain deals with trauma. As Howe points out, "For two centuries American Indians fought genocide, negotiated Indian

identity, and struggled against cultural assimilation," and it is these experiences that continue to haunt each descendant as a result (Fortier). It is this state of hauntedness that leads many scholars to point out that with historical trauma the symptoms are often associated with those of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which could stem from childhood trauma "passed on from parent to child" (O'Neill et al. 173). With historical trauma, it is critical to identify each of these traumas and what is causing them to be passed from parent to child.

One of the primary historical traumas that continue to affect many Choctaw descendants is forced removal of the Choctaw people from their lands. Historian Arthur H. DeRosier, Jr. suggests that though the 1820's and 1830's, the Choctaw people started to see their lands being taking away from them with each passing year. DeRosier goes on to say that "the Choctaw were not a fierce uncivilized people which had declared war on the United States or ravaged undefended frontier communities," but instead they were a "peace-loving nation which could boast of political stability, economic prosperity, and friendly relations" with the U.S. government (343). Choctaw Indians negotiated a total of "eight treaties with the federal government ceding well over ten million acres of land" before the year of 1830 (DeRosier 344). But that was not enough, on "September 27, 1830 the commissioners representing the United States and the Choctaw Nation signed the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek," which removed the Choctaw from their homelands and forced them into "less desirable region in Indian Territory" (343). As each plot of land was given away, so was the cultural traditions that had survived for generations before the Europeans arrived. After those actions by the U.S. government, the Choctaw people were forced to move west, and a large amount of the population died during the move. Those that made the trip were forced to deal with the loss of their loved ones and, in the process, forced to adjust to their new homeland.

Over the story, Ezol Day's character helps Lena recreate her Native American ethnic identity. Howe's use of a ghost that cannot rest points back to how many Choctaw believe that a person has two spirits, “shilombish and shilup” (Nephew and Bial 61). Samantha Nephew and Raymond Bial suggest that shilombish was a person’s spirit during their lifetime and after their death, the shilombish “remained on earth as a ghost” but the shilup spirit “upon death journeyed to a happy place known as the land of ghosts” (61). Whether Ezol’s spirit is one of these or some other kind of spirit, Ezol nevertheless provides the reader with a clear picture of what Indigenous children had to endure during the European invasion(s). One example is the forceful removal of children from their homes, forcing them to learn English and act as the white invaders. Teresa Brockie, Gail Dana-Sacco, Gwenyth Wallen, Holly C. Wilco, and Jacquelyn C. Campbell claim that the removal of children from their families dating back to the beginning of the late 1800s, “has been cited as having the longest lasting harmful effects of all the assimilation and termination policies put forth by the U.S. Government largely due to abuse and neglect experience that continue to have a negative impact on tribal identity” (411). It is these harmful effects that continue to haunt those children that were forced to attend those schools.

In *Miko Kings*, Lena wants to forget that she was “half Choctaw and half Sac and Fox” and has forgotten most of the language her grandmother has taught her (Howe 18). Although Lena and Ezol are related and are separated by time and space, they have many of the same traumas or have endured some of the same adversity by having Indigenous decent. Brockie et al. suggest that recent studies of Native Americans found historical loss could lead to increased depression symptoms and has been “associated with anger and aggression among adolescents, depression among adults, suicidal behavior, and substance use among children” (412). Linking this to Lena's character, Howe conveys that Lena's childhood was not perfect, with an absent

father and mother. It is here that the audience sees how Lena's character coveys this ripple effect of how generations are affected by the trauma, not just the Native Americans that were forced to assimilate all those years ago.

Howe's novel provides insight into how many young Native American children sent to Indian orphanages or boarding schools were forced to learn English and suppress their native tongue. This act of placing indigenous children in boarding schools or orphanages lasted in the U.S. and Canada until around the 1950s. Brockie et al. suggests that "historical trauma experiences including loss of language, culture, and land that occurred over 100 years ago persist today as expressed in historical loss associated symptoms and discrimination reported by these Native American adolescents and young adults" (418). This loss of language and the lack of fluency in the receiving society can post a mental health threat for those who struggle to speak fluently in the dominant society's language. With that said, it is crucial to understand how the suppression of the native tongue and fluency issues relate to Howe's characters and how losing one's first language can lead to this state of hauntedness.

An example of this linguistic suppression is when Hope Little Leader and other characters are sent to boarding schools and how they were traumatically affected by "seemingly consistent series of punishments for speaking in Choctaw, practicing indigenous beliefs, and attempting to run away" (Squint 7). Looking at this further, Whitbeck et al. claim that "as part of government policy of forced assimilation," children were taken from their families and "reeducated in settings that ignored kinship patterns, punished the use of traditional language, and sought to replace traditional religious beliefs with Christianity" (17). It is clear from Howe's narrative that these boarding schools directed by the U.S. Government were trying to remove Choctaw language forcefully and did not respect their culture and native tongue.

When learning a second language, Patsy M. Lightbown and Nina Spada suggest that it is crucial to keep the learner's ethnic identity during the learning process since this typically correlates to positive results reducing stress during the learning process. Children and adults are often “sensitive to social dynamics and power relationships” within the host society when it comes to language use and how the learner perceives these during acquisition (Lightbown & Spada 89). Although the novel implies that Ezol excels with learning a second language, Hope struggles, hinting that other Indigenous children received trauma by the colonizers trying to replace their native tongue with English. Patrice Hollrah claims that Howe provides a link to how these colonial educational systems, which converted Native American students to “Christianity, taught them how to read and write in English, but in return tried to erase all aspects of their Native culture” (47). Ezol's letters show her mastery of the English language, but it is clear that she continues to hold value to her native tongue and where she came from, and received trauma from this learning environment. An example is how Ezol, throughout her journal entries, continues to use her first language, using Choctaw words in almost every letter stating, “Si apela,” which means “help me” (Howe 144). Howe’s depiction of the learning environment implies that many Indigenous children received trauma not only by being removed from their families but also were haunted by losing their ethnic identity and native tongue.

For any learner, learning a second language is a very complicated process. One issue that children learning a second language must deal with is code-switching. Code-switching is the process of a learner trying to find the “words or phrases from more than one language with a conversation” (Lightbown & Spada 31). This act of code-switching between the first and second language can delay responses by the learner. Often, this process is not fully understood by those around them, including education professionals. Code-switching can be seen in *Miko Kings* when

Hope searches for the correct English words when screaming for them to bring back his baby sisters, Helema and Lucinda. At that moment, when Hope needed the English words the most, he fails to find them and yells “Aichna,” which means “alas” in English (65). This moment in time for a young child can be a very traumatic memory, and one can see how this can be a haunting experience for Hope due to his grief, his concern for his sisters, and his failure to speak when his sisters needed him the most.

Many years after the children attended these boarding schools, as Howe's novel depicts and as Montgomery’s study proposes, many Native Americans still view these boarding schools as haunted by ghosts. This state of hauntedness stems from centuries of colonization and scars these schools inflicted on each child. It is these experiences that create these ghost stories that continue to be passed down from generation to generation. Montgomery suggests that although many Native Americans have not seen ghosts personally, they do admit having received numerous traumas from attending these schools. Montgomery’s research goes along with how traumatic experiences cause trauma that, if left unresolved, can haunt a person until they try to come to some sort of peace with it. Authors like Howe have started to give a voice back to those that were forced into silence. As stated earlier, this act of sharing stories can be a way to come to terms with the trauma and can lead to a reduction in the effects on the human mind. Montgomery's study shows how attendees of these boarding schools continue to share these ghost stories, and it is these which provides an outlet for emotional expression of pain, recognizes a shared experience, and tells a shared survival of all of those that experienced it.

Another trauma Howe reveals to the reader is how Ezol loses her life on Earth. Howe provides the reader with a fictional news article from *The Ada Weekly News* stating that the “Fire claimed the life of Ada postal clerk Ezol Day as she was trapped inside the Miko Kings business

office, the evening of October 11" (205). Ezol's death by fire suggests that she was not adequately buried based on Choctaw beliefs. Someone's burial beliefs can be a substantial factor in finding peace after a loved one has passed. Many years ago, the Choctaw burial consisted of placing the dead body about "five to six feet from the ground" upon a wooden platform and covering their loved ones with special cloth of their making (Buckner 55). After the fresh decays, the bones are taken down by what tribes called a bone-picker and then placed into a particular house built just for the bones of the tribe (Bucker 55). For those that are left behind, the process of mourning was necessary. However, if this process was not allowed, then the failure to mourn appropriately by Choctaw standards can create emotional distress and lead to these ghost stories that Montgomery has proposed.

One of the powerful weapons against cultural dictates is the act of writing. Literature is a way to fight against political and social injustices. Through this process, the reader will learn from humanity's mistakes and how "people transcend time and enter into the world of immortality" (Howe 69). Howe's idea of tribalography brings a voice back to those that may be lost within the world's rhetorical space. Howe suggests "that by understanding its effects on the original immigrants, the power of Native storytelling is revealed as a living character who continues to influence our culture" even today (118). Howe suggests that:

> The study of tribalography is advanced by first looking at how Indian people made story from events and non-events. Secondly, by examining how the oral tradition and written texts are a symbiosis of Old World and New World, it becomes evident that Native authors are important to expanding our understanding of story at the beginning of the new millennium. (118)

Howe's use of tribalographic connections allows Lena to start to reconnect, remembering what she was taught many years ago. This glimpse into the past allows her to reconnect to her Choctaw heritage, putting the pieces together along the way. Ezol benefits from this connection as well. For her, this process somehow releases what Phillips advises are demons that are "countless manifestations of transgression toward which- and by which- we are variously driven" (65). Ezol's memories, for better or worse, demonstrate how she loved or not loved everything she lost, and it is these memories that nevertheless refuses, somehow, to go away. Ezol's use of tribalography seems to be a means to lay these memories, ghosts, or demons to rest, but by giving in to them, however briefly, Ezol appears as she brought them under control somehow. Sometimes it is the act of speaking about the trauma that allows a person to understand what we cannot fully control or understand entirely. It is through this process that a person can benefit and somehow remove some of the hauntedness from their mind. When discussing how her Choctaw characters use this process of moving back and forward in time, Howe, in an interview, suggests

> Because there's no past, present, or future tense per se in Choctaw or other tribal languages, there are only animate and inanimate ways to differentiate both genders and that things tend to be ever-present, ever alive; and the same thing for spirits that are alive in the house, usually our relatives that come back. And how do we think about that gauze of past, present, and future with the future being spirits? (Howe, interview, Inge).

In *Miko Kings,* Ezol's temporary capability to move freely through time allows her to conjoin the "past, present, and future at any given moment" (Snyder 89). It is this joining of the past to the present that helps Lena on her quest to find the accurate account of what happened all those years ago to the Miko King's baseball team, and in a way provides the accurate account of Lena's own family's history. Howe's use of moving freely through time is not exclusive to Ezol,

and it is implied that Lena learns the art of time travel as well. By the end of the novel, Lena has apparently unlocked the secret of time, traveling back to visit Sayyed, where he states, “I see right through you” (208). Much like Ezol's death, Sayyed’s death was not traditional since he died by fire, much like Ezol’s death. As stated earlier, Sayyed’s death is the result of the U.S. bombing, and it seems he is stuck between life and death. Howe portrays Sayyed as in a state of unrest or a state of distress by having him repeat over and over “Tukbrinin yaa Habiibi. Bury me” (208). Howe’s portrayal of Sayyed’s ghost or spirit being stuck in the afterlife points back to how not much has changed and how the U.S. Government, directly and indirectly, continues to traumatize people around the world.

Howe’s portrayal of tribalography hints that these Choctaw cultural elements continue to be passed down within their descendants, and it is up to them to unlock their secrets. What many people forget and what makes the oppression of North American Indigenous population relevant is that they originated long ago and continues even today. The oppression by the U.S. government and others has some trying to escape reservation life for a life that is across the border. An example is how Lena’s character herself admits that she wanted to forget that she was “half Choctaw and half Sac and Fox” (18). The research by Brockie et al. implies that even though years have passed, the descendants of Native Americans are still suffering from the harmful effects of assimilation and polices by the U.S. government. Even today, these adverse effects continue to have a negative impact on their tribal identity. The creation of borders and the act of reservation segregation continues to create “areas of high poverty resulting in increased social problems, greater exposure to stress and fewer resources with which to cope with these exposures” (Brockie et al. 412). The simple act of living on a reservation can be a reminder of the trauma of ethnic cleansing and the broken promises that happened all those years ago. The

research by Brockie et al. illustrates that Native American descendants are experiencing some of the same traumatic experiences as their ancestors. It is these traumas that trigger the creation of these ghosts and the need to discuss what haunts each of them.

There is no question that literature is a powerful force because it can help the reader depict ruptures in our understanding of the past, the present, and our possible futures. A person reading multicultural literature can watch the centuries pass in moments, and it is here they will start to see the world in its more profound complexity. For Native Americans, the perceived historical loss can be a constant reminder of the trauma they are continuing to endure. These traumatic memories create these ghosts or spirits that stem from various cultural losses, forced linguistic silence, or simply the memories of loved ones lost. It is these ghosts that demand our attention, that force Native Americans to have no rest, no satisfaction, and leaving them in a restless state of hauntedness. As a way to right these wrongs, Howe uses Choctaw ghosts and their narrative to create a space to hear this hauntedness, and by doing this, she gives Native Americans a voice and a hope for the future.

CHAPTER TWO

Ethnic Memory and Uncovering the State of Hauntedness:

Monique Truong's *Bitter in the Mouth*

North Carolina has had many people call it home even though they were not born inside its borders. One person born within North Carolina's borders was Virginia Dare in 1587, but promptly she vanished without a trace. Since then, Virginia Dare has haunted North Carolina and American literature since her disappearance. What happened to this small child is unknown, but what is known is that her ghost continues to haunt North Carolina's history, and it continues to search for the truth. The only thing history has taught North Carolinians is that she was "taken from the arms of history and placed on legend's lap" (Truong 68). As time passes, authors are fueled by Virginia Dare's story and continue to write her back into existence, telling fantastical tales of her life after her disappearance. What really happened to her? No one knows. Monique Truong's novel, *Bitter in the* Mouth (2010), carries on this tradition, bringing her ghost-back to life once more, continuing her search for answers. Although Virginia Dare's disappearance haunts American history, her ghost is not the main haunting within Truong's novel. It is Virginia Dare's modern-day alter ego, Linda Hammerick, and others that provide the haunting.

Kathleen Brogan defines the haunting as "centrally concerned with the issues of communal memory, cultural transmission, and group inheritance, stories of cultural haunting share the plot device and master metaphor of the ghost as go-between, enigmatic transitional figure moving between past and present, death and life, one culture and another"(6). Although there is no question of how powerful the use of these ghosts can be in multicultural literature, it is critical to hear all the haunted narratives and not just those of the historic past. Linda's character and her state of hauntedness within *Bitter the Mouth* demonstrates how crucial it is to

hear all of the cultural haunting narratives and why it is critical not to rely on a ghost as the master metaphor.

Just like Virginia Dare, Linda is tasked with living within the void between two cultures and is “a child caught in the crux of a conflict between multiple world powers” (Kaus 94). Linda’s narrative portrays how many Asian Americans experienced traumatic oppressions and injustices by living within this void. Truong’s portrayal of Linda suggests that her life experiences uniquely haunt her, and these stem from her experiences growing up in the small town of Boiling Springs, North Carolina. Aliana Kaus proposes that Truong’s novel links and “demonstrates the continuing presence of the past, the lasting significance of place and the weight of familial heritage” (84). Placed in the America South, Truong’s narrative shows that Linda’s state of hauntedness is made up of a complex mixture of traumatic events during her childhood and adolescent years that makes her personal identity. This goes along with Carl Phillips's suggestion that we never really lose something within the “innocence of childhood, or at least the memory of it” (96). These childhood to adolescent memories, for better or worse, changes each person and make them who they are today.

The novel’s storyline begins by portraying Linda as a young child, much like any other child growing up in American South during the nineteen seventies. Truong starts this process by describing how dysfunctional Linda’s family is and then detailing her childhood relationship with her friend Kelly. Truong creativity uses the act of letter writing to allow the reader to see the “inner lives” of these two children (16). This process of writing back and forth creates a pathway inside their adolescent experiences as they both grow up in the American South. Truong begins her novel by allowing the reader to believe that Linda is just like any other child in the South during that time. Truong hides Linda's identity and does not reveal how Linda is different

from the other children and the people around her until later in the novel. Instead, Truong provides the reader with examples of how Linda is like most children around her, including her typical southern childhood obsessions, such as how Kelly and Linda idealized Dolly Parton throughout the narrative. At one part of the story, Linda's mother DeAnne, discovers the children's obsession and responds by stating that Dolly has a "beautiful voice" but that she is "trashy" (Truong 19). After hearing DeAnne's opinion, the girls promptly "vowed to be trashy" just like Dolly (Truong 19). By creating typical childhood obsessions, Truong further links Linda's and Kelly's personal identities as Southern girls.

Truong's narrative suggests that as Linda starts to understand how she is physically different from the other kids and family around her and how as she ages, she notices how she is treated or looked differently than others around her. Truong herself lived in Boiling Springs for three years during her youth and claims to be "a Southern girl, twice over" (Truong, "Monique Truong"). Phillips suggests that our life experiences become "a part of that lens through which we see - as in understand - the world we pass through" (31). Truong's personal story is much like Linda Hammerick's narrative. She was born in Vietnam and came to the United States in 1975 as a refugee (Truong, "Monique Truong"). When discussing why she and her parents fled Vietnam and came to the United States, Truong states:

> I was six years old when my mother and I left Vietnam in April of 1975. It was suppose to be just a precautionary measure, a temporary solution to keep us safe from the nightly bombings. My father, who was a high level executive for an international oil company, stayed behind at their bequest. Later that month, when Saigon fell to the communist forces my father left on a boat for the South China Sea, the same sea that my mother and

> I were lucky enough to have flown over in an airplane just weeks before. (Truong, "Monique Truong")

Truong's act of placing *Bitter in the Mouth* within the small town where she grew up suggests it is not her family's escape from Vietnam that haunts her; rather, it is those childhood experiences in Boiling Springs that motivated her to write this novel. When it comes to the cultural haunting genre, Brogan states "to be haunted in this literature is to know, viscerally, how specific cultural memories that seem to have disappeared in fact refuse to be buried and still shape the present, in desirable and in troubling ways" (16). Looking at this further, Kaus proposes that by writing this novel, Truong tries to reclaim ownership of her own story and come to "terms with her personal history" (98). In an interview with Jihii Jolly for Lambda Literary, Truong explains some of her motivation for creating this novel:

> Boiling Springs is where I learned how to speak English. Boiling Springs was where I became—in a blink of an eye—not just a little girl but a Chink, a Jap, and a Gook (all the names that my classmates called me). Boiling Springs was where I learned that I was physically different, ugly, and a target. (Truong, "Monique Truong")

After many years, it is those years in Boiling Springs that haunted Truong and fueled the creative writing process. It was fueled by the ghosts of children running around the playground, ghosts of past children that used to sit beside her in class, ghosts of past adults that looked at her funny when she walked into a restaurant. It is these people and those childhood memories that inspired Truong to dive deep and creatively look for a way to bring shape for what was shapeless in her mind. By doing this, Truong informs "strangers what it was like to grow up being Asian in the South" (*Bitter* 169). Rachael Price suggests that Truong's novel shows how Linda suffered from being categorized as "Other" while growing up in Boiling Springs (50). Truong's novel

provides the reader with a connection between Linda's Asian appearance and the negative attitudes towards her by her family and the Cleveland County, North Carolina residents. The reader starts to understand this when Linda describes how people looked at her when visiting the local “Piggly Wiggly” or “Hudson’s department stores, where “the women who worked there looked at me with eyes that always made me uncomfortable” (Truong, *Bitter* 170).

Truong’s novel exemplifies how Asian Americans living in the US were adversely affected and haunted by the Vietnam war fought thousands of miles across the ocean. Daniel Kim and Viet Thanh Nguyen suggests that the Vietnam War “or what the victorious Vietnamese call the American War –was a monumentally traumatic event for Americans that divided the nation and haunted it for decades” and it was this war that lead to a “influx of hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese and other Southeast Asian refugees” seeking solace within its borders (2). Another element that adds to the division and he hate in the United States is the fight between the north and south, further reminding those in the South of the defeat of the American Civil War. Price proposes that the defeat of South Vietnam not only marks an “actual downfall of a country (most notably in the form of the fall of Saigon in April of 1975), but it also marks a defeat of popular Western ideals, such as the containment of Communism, and, on a larger scale, global imperialism” (51). The United States’ failure in the war adds hate to the “American South, an area whose actual genesis sprang from the politically charged issues that led to the war itself” (Price 50). Just as Truong’s personal story suggests, many of these Vietnamese and other Southeast Asian refugees were met with hateful stares, prejudice, racism and traumatic experiences.

The Vietnam War not only affected those Asian Americas that experienced the trauma firsthand, it affected their children as well. The critic Qiong He suggests that “war brings focus

to a historical past directly experienced by the first generation who transmits this traumatic memory to their children born in America" (132). Another factor can be the very classification of "Asian American," which "reflects the enshrinement of race as the dominant category shaping the discussion and conceptualization of minority culture in America" (Yao 4). United States losing the war and labeling someone "Asian" or "Other" further fueled hate, prejudices, and traumatic experiences, just as Truong's novel portrays.

Truong connects Linda's state of hauntedness to her experience of racial oppression even though Linda claims that she has a "southern accent," and there is "nothing Asian" about her except her body (*Bitter* 169-170). Truong portrays Linda's journey as a problematic and often lonely process that "leads not to a complex and self-actualized multicultural identity" but results in a young girl caught between cultures and labeled as "Other" or an outsider within the space of her existences (Price 51). Over the first half of the novel, Truong hides Linda's Asian American complexion from the reader's viewpoint. Doing this, Truong shows the reader how Linda was otherwise not different in many ways from any other children running around Boiling Springs. It is not until Truong decides to inform the reader of Linda's "otherness" that the reader started to understand how she is different. This can be seen when Linda states, "the children of Boiling Springs had their own idea of how to welcome me to town" and that they "were never fooled" by her new name Linda Hammerick (*Bitter* 171). Truong provides the reader with how those "clever monsters" would pick on Linda and would silently mouth "Chink" or "Jap" or "Gook" at a level the teacher would not hear (*Bitter* 171). Kaus states that those "slurs are intended to belittle her psychological interiority, but they also denounce her material body" (88). As a way to separate this from regular childhood name-calling, Linda adds, "your parents must have been your teachers," and they are the ones that educated those children, the "clever monsters" (172).

Truong highlights how these prejudices and name-calling are not just limited to the children, but are common among the adults as well.

Bitter in the Mouth invokes the reader to see how people can be haunted by their past, and how these life experiences change them, forcing them to find some way to deal with traumatic memories. When it comes to the power of memories, Linda states that "MEMORY IS A CURSE," and she describes it as "a thorn, a broken water glass, a jellyfish in a wave that crashed into" her and then when it was done, it "reached back for more" (*Bitter* 115). Phillips suggests that to understand this process better, we all have to embrace these thoughts and bring shape to what is shapeless in our minds. Truong novel illustrates how history continues to show how prejudices toward those considered as "other" within American society, creating these haunting memories and how it is not just limited to one race or race itself. Price proposes that Linda story is one that marginalizes "both the Southern United States and South Vietnam (and, more broadly, the significance of the cultural effects of the Vietnam War) ultimately render her journey of self-discovery a difficult and often lonely process, as the stamp of the "South" leads not to a complex and self-actualized multicultural identity, but to a place in which Linda functions in a kind of suspended animation, herself rendered an "Other" (to varying degrees) within both of the Southern cultures that make up her complex identity" (51). Unlike Truong, Linda does not have ties or memories of her Vietnamese heritage, and as a transcultural adoptee she can only consider herself a North Carolinian.

This understanding and disconnection to Linda's past forces Linda to search for identity within a book about North Carolina's historical people. Given by her father, the book *North Carolina Parade: Stories of History and People*, published in 1966, "contained easy-to-read histories" of North Carolina and its historical people "reduced to 209 pages and a handful of

drawings" (*Bitter* 52). These ghosts from North Carolina's past, including Virginia Dare, do not help Linda find her identity but instead serve to "further emphasize her own sense of invisibility of being in a void" (Price 59). Linda states that her father gave her this book as a way that would "foster a sense of security and belonging," but instead, she saw this book as a "bait and switch" (*Bitter* 52). Linda's father's hope was that the book would give her a connection to North Carolina. Instead, her reality in Boiling Springs is full of prejudices toward her because of the color of her skin, and she is left not accepted by her own culture and her family, which is the only one she knows. This void further fuels her state of hauntedness, creating emotional scars stemming from traumatic events, secrets, voices of hate, and the silence from her family and friends around her.

In her article "Alternative Historical Tetherings," Michele Janette suggests that "Truong tethers her work to historical anchors located on the North American continent rather than the Southeast Asian subcontinent" (194). Janette's claim proposes that Linda's state of hauntedness does not directly stem from a lack of knowledge of her Vietnamese heritage or ancestral lineage but instead is rooted in and stemming from her experiences growing up in North Carolina. Price suggests, "Linda's status as a transracial adoptee complicates this 'exclusivity' even further because, while her Asian appearance defies white normativity, she is not a recent immigrant but rather someone entrenched in the history of a patriarchal Southern tradition" (56). It is this American South environment that fuels Linda's traumatic experiences, scars, and traumatic memories and creates the haunting over the novel.

Truong's novel portrays how each character uses silence to deal with trauma. They do this to avoid conflict between one another and hide their state of hauntedness from others' viewpoints. In family and friendships, silence can be a hidden weapon. Parrott proposes that

“silence can be an integral part of linguistic relationships when we recognize it as part of discourse” (377). Throughout Truong’s novel, she uses secrets, and linguistic silence like it is a plague that cannot be contained, reaching all the residents of this little town in North Carolina. Linda has a habit of keeping secrets over the novel. One of her secrets is her friendship with Kelly once they arrive at Boiling Springs High School (BSHS). It was then that Kelly distanced herself from her childhood friend and started instead courting “the upper-class girls in the inner circle, while their boyfriends circled her like she was a wounded animal” (*Bitter* 24). This separation of the two friends suggests that it was uncool to be seen with Linda since she was labeled as “other” within their society. Without Kelly's friendship at school, Linda is forced into a state of loneliness, and this can be seen when she states, “for most of my freshman year at BSHS, I hid in the girls’ bathroom with my packet of Winston Reds until one day I realized that I was behaving like my mother, DeAnne” (*Bitter* 24). In social psychiatry, Hyland et al. suggest that childhood and adulthood traumatization have both been linked to an “increased likelihood of experiencing loneliness” sometime within their lifetime (1090). Hyland et al.'s study suggests that a side effect to Linda's state of loneliness is an increased likelihood of difficulty building interpersonal relationships as she ages, which in turn decreases the likelihood of her having resources to cope with the traumatic events within her lifetime.

Linda’s state of hauntedness is compounded by her and her family’s habit of keeping secrets. Brogan proposes that “families do not simply tell stores; stories create families” and that “lineage is established through rivers of words; the oral transmission” of their group history and their personal stories (18). Linda’s story is one of many hardships and she keeps her biggest secret from the one person she truly loves over the narrative, her uncle Baby Harper. Over the novel, Kelly is assaulted, and Linda is raped by Kelly’s cousin Bobby. Linda does not tell her

uncle her secret until years later. Linda suggests that this experience lingers over her lifetime, proposing that there is a "haunting of one body by another body, the transference of culpability from the perpetrator to the one who had knowledge of the crime" (*Bitter* 83). Rebecca L. Gibson and Timothy S. Hartshorne's study "supports the significant negative effect of childhood sexual abuse on the experience of loneliness" and how as women aged, they showed signs that they were adversity affected by those abusive acts (1092). However, secrets are secrets until they are not. Detailing this, Linda describes the moment when she finally felt comfortable enough to reveal her secret to her uncle, and that can be seen when she states

> when I finally told my great-uncle Harper, he cried. He held my hands and cried. His own hands were trembling. I told him that it would be all right, that it had been all right for years now, seven, in fact, which did little to console him. (*Bitter* 44)

As seen in Linda's account, she claims that this traumatic experience has been "all right" for years, but it took her all of seven years to actually tell someone besides Kelly what happened all those years ago. Even though she claims that everything okay and that she has come to terms with that event, the time gap revealing her secret suggests that everything is not okay, and that she is still haunted by that event. By breaking the linguistic silence about that event, Linda opens up a space to continue the healing process and possibly take the next steps with dealing with that traumatic experience and this part of the haunting.

Traumatic memories do not stem only from abuse or how we are treated at school or how we are treated within the town we live in. Sometimes trauma can also stem from family ties. Over the novel, Truong's portrayal suggests that Linda's family uses silence to suppress her true identity, including her "southern accent" and her "Vietnamese face" (223). When discussing Iris, Linda relates to her grandmother's silence: "as a grandmother, she had the duty to protect me

from harm, to teach me right from wrong, and to endure, on her part, the questioning stares of her neighbors and friends with ever once opening up her mouth" (*Bitter* 166). Linda's character is, in some ways, gaining knowledge of a set of "discursive relationships that have formed over time and presents the statement as the ultimate foundation of discourse and, consequently, the elemental existence of knowledge" (Parrott 337). After Linda's father passes away, Linda also brings up how silence is used by DeAnne, stating they "lived in a silent house" and continuing by stating, "conversations were no longer necessary, not because we understood each other's thoughts but because we didn't want to know what the other was thinking" (Truong 124).

Truong portrays how silence can be haunting for the secret holder and for those around them when the secret is revealed. In keeping with the novel's recurring theme of keeping family secrets, Linda finds out more about her father after his death. Thomas Hammerick is one person she wanted dearly to love her back. Linda's describes her father as a "Reasonable Man" over the narrative (*Bitter* 28). Jennifer Brandt proposes that labeling her father a "Reasonable Man" demonstrates "how the white, masculine point of view is considered 'standard,' and therefore neutral in society, and as a result, the ways in which the judgment of those considered deviant, amoral, or 'Other,' are always juxtaposed to a construct of moral superiority that while not real itself, has very real consequences" (49). Truong, by labeling Thomas as the standard for whiteness, suggests that this cultural element prevents him from genuinely showing Linda the love she desires. This can be seen when Linda describes her relationship with her father:

> As a father, he was generous. More or less. The "less" was because he never gave me what I wanted. He gave me only what he wanted me to have. I found this was often true with philanthropy and with love. The giver's desire and fulfillment played an important role. (*Bitter* 55)

What is not in question is that Linda loved her father, even with his "Reasonable Man" persona. The death of a loved one can haunt a family member for years after that person's death. Linda and her family are left not only to mourn their lost loved one, but they are also forced to come terms with the secrets he has kept and how he passes away. After her father's death, Linda finds out the truth about her father and how "at the end of his life, Thomas Hammerick wasn't a Reasonable Man" at all, but a man with a weak heart (*Bitter* 128). In a small town like Boiling Springs, Thomas dying of a heart attack in his mistress's driveway, forces his family to keep another secret. Brandt proposes that "the notion of secrets works as a framing device in the novel, as Truong structures the text through the trope of "visibility" (50). Truong portrays that each of the family members has some secret hidden way, and it is this act of being silent that haunts and hovers over the family throughout the narrative.

Linda's transcultural adoption and lack of knowledge about her Vietnamese heritage creates a space where Linda's hauntedness is not tethered to Southeast Asia, but is instead tied to the American South. It is this disconnection that opens up a space for all of the voices of the haunted, including all the traumatic experiences referenced in the novel, such as Linda's uncle Baby Harper having to hide his true identity from the world around him. Price proposes that Linda and Baby Harper are "not fully seen" throughout the novel (57). Price goes on to say that Linda and her uncle to be able to "survive as iconoclasts," they need to make "themselves invisible, by distancing themselves from the bodies that betray them as different from the Boiling Springs status quo" (57). This scope allows the reader to begin to understand how a state of hauntedness is not limited to a person or one race. This cultural state of hauntedness, this cultural "void", is more complex; it is rooted and caused by siloed cultural identities and siloed cultural

religious beliefs. Linda's uncle exemplifies why it is essential to hear all of the haunting within literature.

Price proposes that Linda's uncle's "homosexuality, like Linda's Asian countenance, serves not so much as a distinguishing feature but as a way to further erode his visibility in the community" (57). Baby Harper hides his true self since it is not acceptable within the cultural he lives within. Boiling Springs is in the heart of the American South and John Moran indicates that the American South is often considered the most "homophobic U. S. region" due to "evangelical" whites promotion to "quarantine homophobia" within the region's "media and [its] cultural productions" (96, 100). Baby Harper has to quarantine his true identity from everyone around him. He does this by removing himself from all photographs and not revealing his true self to everyone around him. Linda's narration suggests that Baby Harper loves to take photographs of other people, but he would refuse for anyone to take his photograph. Linda states that by excluding himself from the family photographs, he alters their family's "official history," making it incomplete and a "false one" (*Bitter* 41). Linda's narration suggests that only a few people knew the real Baby Harper:

> My great-uncle was a sixty-two-year-old, never-married male librarian with a velvet divan, which he pointed out to me was the same color as the curtains that Scarlett O'Hara had made into a gown. These weren't clues; they were flashing signs. I loved him more because of them. The good folks of the great Boiling Springs-Shelby area looked at my great-uncle and looked right past him. They are the unlit pigs, I remembered thinking that night. (*Bitter* 44)

While in college, Linda finds out the secrets her great uncle has been hiding from everyone for all these years. Truong reveals his secrets via his letters to Linda and the photo albums that were

sent to her after his death. It is these photo albums that showed her how her uncle "transformed himself step by step into a woman" (*Bitter* 205). Brandt proposes that "as a gay man with a fondness for women's clothes, Baby Harper knows what it is like to feel like an outsider growing up in the South" (46). Baby Harper hides his true self from his family and the people of Boiling Springs, and it is not until his vacation travels that he transforms into his true self. Linda's uncle's photographs, secrets, and hiding his true personal identity "serve as reminders to the multiplicities of history and location and those that remain" unseen and unheard within American culture (Brandt 47). In Cleveland County, Baby Harper keeps his personal identity a secret and hidden from everyone's eyes but his significant other Cecil. It is not until his death that his true identity is revealed, and it is only then when the reader can understand Baby Harper's trauma and his unique state of hauntedness.

Sometimes moments in time haunt us, and it takes this deep dive within ourselves for us to find the answers we are looking for. After finding the answers, "we find we are not the selves today that we were just yesterday" (Phillips 31). Truong dives down deep, looking for answers and trying to understand what haunted her, and reflecting on her personal experiences. Truong, writing *Bitter in the Mouth,* does not avoid harm as well as those places where harm is possible; she embraces it. She does this for the "chance to know the self-more fully than before" (Phillips 34). Phillips suggests that "uncertainty disturbs, it challenges us where we had felt comfortable, it unsettles us," and if we do not embrace it, "we merely get older, [and] we never deepen" (34). It is vital to recognize what something or someplace means to us in the end. Truong, when discussing how she felt after writing *Bitter in the Mouth,* states

> maybe writing for me is simply that: years of therapy–but by the end of writing *Bitter in the Mouth* I knew I was finally leaving that painful place behind, and of equal importance

was that I was finally seeing many of the other stories within Boiling Springs. (Truong, "Monique Truong")

Roy Hoffman suggests that over *Bitter in the Mouth*, Truong's "explores – and explodes – these secrets at a captivating pace". It is these secrets that are at the heart of Linda state of hauntedness. Phillips proposes that it is human nature to avoid harm "as well as those places where harm is possible" (34). Truong's novel illustrates how one silence "led to another, and eventually the silences became the life preservers dotting the dangerous ocean between" many of the novel's characters (*Bitter* 281). But as each secret is kept, this action further fuels Linda' s state of hauntedness. It is not until the silence with her mother DeAnne is broken that the healing process started to begin for Linda. With all Linda's haunting experiences, one of the most power is the distance between her and her mother. Linda's character shows how in the end "we want, too, to be loved, and we want, by extension", what we love to love us back (Phillips 45). By opening up and talking to her mother about haunting, Linda brings the haunting within her control, embracing it, in an effort find answers and in the process possibly understand her "tender roots" and what all those memories, those experiences and those secrets mean to her in the end (Truong, *Bitter* 282).

In *Bitter in the Mouth*, Truong goes in-depth, searching for her own answers. Along the way, she creates a story of how a child became a woman, enduring prejudices, racism, traumatic events, death of loved ones, and secrets that haunted her and her family for many years. Brogan proposes that the literature has "much to tell us about our own historical moment and the range of imaginative responses it provokes" (4). Truong's novel's ending suggests that we all need to reflect and understand each of our stories and "where we came from and how we got here" (*Bitter* 282). It is these stories that define each person as they age. Linda's narrative shows how it

is vital to accept everyone for who they are unconditionally, regardless of their origin, skin color, gender choice, or whom they decide to marry. Finally, Truong's novel demonstrates that the way to find answers for what haunts each of us is to embrace it for better or worse, understanding during the process that the memory or ghost is just part of who we are.

CHAPTER THREE

A Poet's State of Hauntedness:

Li-Young Lee's *The City in Which I Love You*

All our experiences, all our memories can be a blessing, but they can also be a curse. Carl Phillips proposes that our experiences "at some level becomes a part of that lens through which we see--as in understand--the world we pass through" (31). Kathleen Brogan suggests that within the cultural haunting genre, "cultural memories that seem to have disappeared in fact refuse to be buried and still shape the present, in desirable and in troubling ways" (16). This type of haunting is not exclusive to multicultural novels and can be seen throughout the poetry genre. An example of a work of poetry that should be included in the cultural haunting genre is Li-Young Lee's book *The City in Which I Love You* (1990). In this book of poetry, Lee uses his life struggles to create art. It is within this space that the reader will witness Lee's state of hauntedness, recreated from the ghosts from his past, his reflection on his own personal memories, and his struggles to understand his own ethnicity. Just like the novels outlined by Brogan and Avery Gordon, Lee's poetry re-creates his "ethnic identity through an imaginative recuperation of the past and [presses] this version of the past into the service of the present" (Brogan 4). Lee uses poetry to search for answers for all that haunts him, forcing him to look for answers within the past and the present. Jacqueline Kolosov proposes that during this creation process, Lee collapses "the boundaries regarding time, space, myth, and personal experience in order to enrich/deepen possibilities for finding meaning" (46). During the creation process, Lee surrenders to the state of hauntedness, which allows him to create art and in the process, hopefully, come to terms with the haunting.

A person's state of hauntedness often stems from their experiences as they age, including each person's ethnic affiliation compared to those around them. What makes up someone's ethnic affiliation can be a complex mixture of cultural elements that each person is exposed to over their lifetime. Lee is an American poet, born in Jakarta, Indonesia, to Chinese parents in 1957 (Lee, interview, Image). The first five years of his life were full of traumatic memories, and to escape "anti-Chinese persecution" in Indonesia, Lee and his family were forced to live in exile to find solace elsewhere (Lee, "A Conversation with Li-Young Lee."). This disconnection from China left Lee growing up "Chinese without the birthright to an ancestral culture, without a grounding knowledge of the Chinese language, and without the community of a Chinatown or a suburban Asian American community" (Xu 129). Throughout Lee's book *The City in Which I Love You*, Lee conveys a feeling of dislocation or disconnection concerning the author's Chinese culture. Wenying Xu proposes that "most critics classify Lee as an Asian American poet and choose to focus on his experience as an *émigré* and his double identity as a Chinese in exile and an American in citizenship" (130). After the "establishment of the People's Republic of China," his parents were force to flee to Indonesia (Lee, "A Celebration of Poetry with Li-Young Lee"). After traumatic experiences in Indonesia Lee and his family fled to "Hong Kong and Japan" before eventually arriving in the States in 1964 (Lee, "A Celebration of Poetry with Li-Young Lee").

After Lee's family fought to arrive in the US, Lee grew up both American and heavily influenced by his parents and their Chinese heritage. Over his lifetime, Lee has been forced to straddling identities, influenced by both Chinese and American cultural elements. Lee states that it is essential for him "to try to escape all stereotypical views of what an Asian is in America, what an immigrant is, what a man is, what a human being is" (Lee, "Li-Young Lee by James

Lee."). Xu proposes that "rejecting his Asian American identity, for Lee, does not purport a willing surrender to assimilation" but instead functions to point out that Lee views "diaspora" as not a "uniquely ethnic condition; rather, it is a human condition" (131-132). Throughout history, siloed cultural identities and siloed cultural beliefs are what is at the heart of what causes these cultural traumatic experiences, leading to the haunting and in turn the need to voice the diasporic narrative. When discussing what makes Lee who he is today, Lee states:

> I think deep down we all feel we're all just, like I'm a version of my mother, a version of my father, I'm a version of my siblings, a version of my friends. I'm a version of an Asian American male of a certain age. I'm a version of a person alive in the 21st century living in the United States. So there are all these aspects of my identity that are just versions of others. (Lee, "Episode 24 Li-Young Lee.")

When it comes to writing poetry, Lee finds it much like the practice of yoga. Lee defines yoga as "any practice that reminds us of our original condition, our embeddedness in God, whether it's breathing meditation or East Indian yogas or any art form" (Lee, "A Conversation with Li-Young Lee."). This relaxation feeling allows Lee to preserve and highlight the past, to understand and analyze the good and bad qualities within each haunting, each trauma, or each life event. Lee has asked his father once about this experience of feeling closer to God; Lee's father responded by stating, "Keep practicing. Keep praying. Keep meditating. Don't cling to those feelings but don't push them away" (Lee, "A Conversation with Li-Young Lee."). In an interview with Michael Collier for the Howard County Poetry and Literature Society, Lee states that he does not like many of his poems but finds comfort in the reflection. This reflection allows the author to move to the next poem as a way of "purification". To become purified, Lee dives into his past, his ethnicity, and creates poetry using "for better and worse, everything" he "loved

or not loved, everything" the author "lost that nevertheless refuses, somehow, to go away" (Phillips 65). This state of meditation or focus allows Lee to conjure up all his ghosts from the past, becoming more aware of the haunting and what these memories mean to him.

Kolosov suggests that in his poetry, Lee "becomes a compassionate witness and participant because he views time and identity as multifaceted and inter-connected" (55). The idea that each person's identity is multifaceted can be seen in the introductory poem titled "Furious Versions," where Lee is torn between and struggles to understand his past and present. Walter A. Hesford proposes that "Furious Versions" is a "seven-part revelation" of Lee's haunted memories (43). Lee's state of hauntedness can be seen when the poem begins with Lee detailing how he is currently "dismantled" by these memories and how these memories "revises" him in a way (13-14). This state of being dismantled or haunted can stem from the heavy weight of his memories on him over time. Within this poem, Lee jumps from one moment of his past to another, suggesting his mind is in a constant state of hauntedness or reflection. This poem's random nature aligns with how memories do not always come to each person in any order. Instead, memories tend to come when they want to, typically influenced by what a person experiences as they age.

As Lee's "Furious Versions" poem progresses, all his influences, his memories, all his ghosts from his past converge, including his family's exile from China, his American influences, his memories of his father and mother, his reflection on spiritual beliefs, and his struggles to understand the reality of life and death. Lee details why it is necessary to tell his story, and this can be seen when the speaker states:

> But I'll not widow the world.
>
> I'll tell my human

tale, tell it against

the current of that vaster, that

inhuman telling.

I'll measure time by losses and destructions.

Because the world

is so rich in detail, all of it so frail;

because all I love is imperfect;

because my memory's flaw

isn't in retention but organization;

because no one asked. (*City* 27)

This complex mixture of memories suggests how Lee struggles with his past, reminding the reader how each of us "cannot always choose our ghosts" (Brogan 19). Lee, by diving into his memories, opens a space where the haunting can be addressed. Discussing the haunting allows him the "possibility of freedom through revision, which functions in this literature like an exorcism" (Brogan 19). It is this exorcism, this reflection, that allows Lee to understand what each of these moments from his past means to him, and that possibly helps him understand these hauntings more fully.

Carolyn J. Grame, Joseph S. Tororici, Bede J. Healey, John H. Dilingham, and Philip Winklebaur propose that trauma survivors often grapple "with such spiritual issues as the meaning of life, the purpose of suffering, good versus evil, shame and guilt, and difficulties surrounding forgiveness of those who hurt them" (237). There is also a common theme of how these traumatic memories or experiences are passed down from one generation to the next. This recurring theme suggests that many writers' work can be affected directly and indirectly by their

parents throughout their lifetime. Lee shows this theme in how he expresses repressed psychological grief triggered by distressing events associated with his family's exile from China. "Furious Versions" details this and how Lee and his family were forced to flee their homeland to find solace elsewhere. In her reading of Gish Jen's *Love Wife*, Su-ching Huang suggests that "through the process of mourning for the dead, the living are able to access a cultural past forgotten or erased by force" (346). In this poem, Lee conveys both his and his parent's experiences, suggesting that his parents' trauma may have been passed down from parent to child. This type of parental influence or intergenerational trauma can be seen in the following lines:

> Once, while I walked
> with my father, a man
> reached out, touched his arm, said, *Kuo Yuan?*
> The way he stared and spoke my father's name,
> I thought he meant to ask, *Are you a dream?*
> Here was the sadness of ten thousand miles,
> of an abandoned house in Nan Jing,
> where my father helped a blind man
> wash his wife's newly dead body,
> then bury it, while bombs
> fell, and trees raised
> charred arms and burned.
> Here was a man who remembered the sound of another's footfalls
> so well as to call to him

after twenty years

on a sidewalk in America. (*City* 23)

In this part of the poem, Lee shows the reader how one interaction with another person can allow a child to witness a parent's diasporic melancholy. Thus, indirectly, the parent's trauma can transfer or become a part of the child's state of hauntedness. In an interview with Matthew Fluharty for the *Missouri Review*, when asked about his relationship with China, Lee responds that when he went back to China, he "got stared at" as much as he did in America (87). These stares, whether in China or America, along with being labeled as "other" in both cultures, leave Lee feeling like he does not "feel at home anywhere" (Lee, "An Interview with Li-Young Lee."). What is clear is how straddling both American and Chinese identities has haunted Lee for years, inspiring him to look for answers within his poetry writing.

Within the multicultural literature, narratives are inspired by the author's state of restlessness. Phillips defines restlessness as a memory or thing "that keeps us up at night, the kind whose catalyst isn't uncertainty, or quest to know what isn't known" at that moment in time (Phillips 52-53). Lee's state of restlessness is heavily influenced by his intent to understand ethnicity. However, other elements haunt Lee as well, including understanding life and death, including how Lee struggles to come to terms with his father's death. In the book *The City in Which I Love You*, Lee shows throughout many of the poems how much he struggles with his father's death and how this influenced his work. Daneen Wardrop proposes when it comes to the topic of ethnicity and "the parent-child relationship in Asian American families," poetry has been "less explored" than other "Asian American novels, narratives, and dramas" (50). Lee's father, Kuo Yuan Lee, can be interrupted as the ancestral ghost within Lee's work, whose spirit haunts his son after his death and over the book of poetry. Lee recreates his father's ancestral voice,

bringing the departed back to life, and in the process allowing himself to reflect and reevaluate his Chinese American immigrant past and get in touch with what these memories mean to him. This reflection can be seen within “Furious Versions” when the lyric I states:

> Soldiers sweep the streets
>
> for my father. My mother
>
> hides him, haggard,
>
> in the closet.
>
> The booted ones herd us
>
> to the sea.
>
> Waves furl, boats
>
> and bodies drift out, farther out.
>
> My father holds my hand, he says,
>
> *Don’t forget any of this.*
>
> A short, bony-faced corporal
>
> asks politely, deferring to class,
>
> *What color suit, Professor, would you like*
>
> *to be buried in? Brown or blue?*
>
> A pistol butt turns my father’s spit to blood. (*City* 18)

Kuo Yuan's ghost or spirit not only speaks to his son in this poem, but he influences Lee throughout the book, creating a ghostly haunting. It is here that Lee reconstructs the past, creating an alternate history by incorporating his family's "unheard or suppressed" story that happened during his childhood (Brogan 17). By including his and his father's trauma within his poem, Lee shows how difficult it can be to separate an individual trauma from a collective based trauma.

As seen in Lee's work, his father's influence comes out in his work, suggesting that Lee still tries to impress his father after the latter's death, and that shows how Lee struggles with the thought of not having his father within his life. In the past, Lee has described how his father haunts him throughout his work and how he has had to force himself to "look beyond" his father for the good of his work (Lee, "Voices of Memory."). An example of this fatherly influence is how his father taught him how to use a mnemonic strategy to vividly remember a place and people's names (Lee, "Voices of Memory."). Lee s states that "early on my father impressed upon his children the importance of the memory," describing how his father "loved strategies to remember things" (Lee, "Voices of Memory."). Lee goes on to say how his father wanted him to improve his memory and taught Lee what he had learned over his lifetime about the topic. Lee suggests that his father taught him a trick or a formula for remembering certain moments within his lifetime. He goes on to say that his father proposed that all a person has to do is simply "emblaze in your memory the image of the room in your head" (Lee, "Voices of Memory."). Lee goes on to say that his father would tell him when he walks into a room, to look around, capturing the room or the "formula" in his head, and this will allow the memory of the place to be available for memory later when needed (Lee, "Voices of Memory."). Lee uses this formula

throughout his poetry, allowing the audience to experience his past, his moments in time, his memories, and thus providing the reader with vivid imagery through memory and poetry.

In his discussion on the connection between memories and hauntedness, Phillips proposes that "presumably we only want to possess what we've assigned value to; we care about it more than we care about something or someone else" (91). Lee's state of hauntedness is compounded by the weight of his personal memories of his father. Lee values these memories of his father and it is those moments that continue to inspire Lee, grabbing his attention, causing the restlessness that Phillips describes. This state of being haunted by a loved one's death can be seen in Lee's poem "My Father, in Heaven, Is Reading Out Loud". The poem begins thus:

> My father, in heaven, is reading out loud
> to himself Psalms or news. Now he ponders what
> he's read. No. He is listening for the sound
> of children in the yard. Was that laughing
> or crying? So much depends upon the
> answer, for either he will go on reading,
> or he'll run to save a child's day from grief.
> As it is in heaven, so it was on earth. (*City* 39)

Lee, in this part of the poem, proposes that his father has not changed and is still "reading out loud," still interrupting, and his focus is only broken when he is tasked to "save a child's day from grief," thus inferring he is still looking over his "children in the yard" even today. Brogan proposes that "the attempt to recuperate some elements of the past, to refit it for the present needs, can be analogized to the process of mourning through which the living revise relationships with the dead" (19). Lee recreates his father's image by using his own memories of

his father, and this is done to understand his death further, questioning where he may be today and what his death means to his state of hauntedness.

After his father's death, Lee states that he inherited all his father's books, and it was at that moment when he began to understand his father more clearly. Lee describes how, when opening his father's Bible for the first time, he could see "all the things he wrote in the margin in the book" and how reading them allowed him to experience his father's "mind at work" (Lee, "Voices of Memory."). Lee goes on to say that his father's mind was "fierce," and his father questioned "everything," including his beliefs (Lee, "Voices of Memory."). After the death of a loved one, it is common nature to start to understand "how disturbing it also is, to recognize that we will die, while the world will continue, utterly indifferent to our having existed" (Phillips 10). In "My Father, in Heaven, Is Reading Out Loud," Lee proposes that he does not understand "the source of starlight, or starlight's destinations," and it is here that the speaker leaves the audience looking up in the sky questioning what lies beyond their own understanding (39). Poetry often leaves the reader without a clear answer. Lee's poem does this; its ending suggests that he is haunted by his lack of knowledge of where his father "waits" and also outlines his own struggles to understand life and death, indicating that he is just like his father, "one of the powerless" against death's door (*City* 40).

Lee's state of hauntedness continues in the poem "A Story." This poem details how a man becomes sad because he is unable to tell a story to his son, who desperately wants him too. Hesford proposes that in this poem Lee struggles with the thought of "a time when the words of his stories will no longer have the power to hold his son" (53). Earlier in the book, in the poem "The Interrogation," the speaker infers that the father tells a story much like Lee's own family's traumatic experiences in Indonesia during his childhood. When discussing this poem, Lee

suggests that writing about these traumatic memories, in a way, “unburdens” him and gives him solace (Lee, *Li-Young Lee*.). Lee states that part of this poem was inspired by his own personal memories of those moments living in Indonesia as a child (Lee, *Li-Young Lee*.). The act of story-telling continues within this poem when the speaker states, “I grow leaden with stories, / my son's eyelids / grow heavy” (34). By including the act of story-telling within this poem, Lee illustrates how influential story-telling can be in the parent-child relationship and how the parent's trauma can be passed down to future generations.

The final poem in *The City in Which I Love You* goes a step further, diving into all that haunts him. Kolosov proposes that in the final poem “The Cleaving,” Lee “goes to exaggerated lengths to understand” all that haunts him at that moment, cleaving up himself and his past so he “can find and accept” himself for who he is (Kolosov 51). Looking at why Lee chooses to end the book with this poem, the reader will start to wonder if there is a time in a person's life when they recognize that life is an endless cycle. The poem describes pain and healing and recognition of the entire process. Lee's creativity links a man watching a butcher chop meat to life's obstacles thrown at each person, scarring the soul and shaping that person along the way. In this poem, Lee is both the butcher and the victim. It is here that Lee chops up his life experiences, his memories, his ethnic identity, and his soul with each cleave of the knife. Xu suggests that Lee “cleaves to his Asian past and Chinese-American identity”; his eating “his race to sing it entails the incorporation of Asian American history, which is fraught with injustice and sacrifice” (153). It is this deep dive into his Asian past, carving up the moments in time, that leads up to the moment of understanding and a way to remember. The theme of devouring one's culture and past educates the reader on different Asian cultural aspects. Lee's repeated use of the word eats or devour relays a message of fighting against history, banishing his fears, and in the process “gets

rid of [his] shame and rage" (Kolosov 52). The word "eating" (che) in Mandarin has the connotation of defeating or overcoming, such as in chess, where one eats the opponent's pieces" (Xu 153). Lee, in this poem, is trying to defeat all those that came before him while battling injustices along the way. Lee's struggles to understand the vision of "the world beneath the "mere" world, or perhaps as accurate, the world that limns "mere" world" (Phillips 76).

When looking at Lee's book's larger structure, each event, each poem shaped Lee and adds a component that makes up the author's soul, his ethnicity, and his state of hauntedness. The final poem, "The Cleaving," allows the reader to see what it is like to chop up those emotions and what has been filed away in the author's soul. Lee describes, "The soul too is a debasement, "referring to how it reduces the quality or value of our lives (81). Lee follows that up by stating, "but, thus, it / acquires salience, although a / human salience," thus meaning that it requires reflection and our attention (81). The speaker then allows the reader to recognize that "The soul is a corruption / and a mnemonic" (82). Here, Lee allows the reader to see how we are all made of our experiences and those people who influenced each of us over our lifetime. These experiences shape how the soul resides in each person, and after reading, the audience will see how these shaped Lee. This poem runs for over three hundred lines, including the stanza that reads:

> I thought the soul an airy thing.
> I did not know the soul
> is cleaved so that the soul might be restored.
> Live wood hewn,
> Its sap springs from a sticky wound.
> No seed, no egg has he

whose business calls for an axe.

In the trade of my soul's shaping

He traffics in hews and hacks. (*City* 86)

Kolosov proposes that this poem "is a poem about being faceless; yet it is also a poem about loving--or at least a poem about rendering with love--one's facelessness in a culture" (51). Throughout the poem, Lee's deep internal reflection is shown in the author's repeated use of the word soul. The word soul is used eleven times in the poem. Its repetition allows the audience to see that the speaker is reflecting on and cutting up these past events so as to better understand and come to terms with each of them. Lee gets rid of any shame and embraces rage from the beginning to the end of the poem. Lee transforms rage into art through the graphic imagery of a man watching a butcher chop meat, and in so doing, Lee chops up his memories and, in the process, his ethnicity. Through these vivid images given by Lee, the reader becomes a witness to the scars on Lee's soul, how they affect him personally, and how with every chop of the butcher's knife, Lee is "restored" in a way (86).

Through the examination of Lee's strong affiliations with Asian and American cultures and of his state of hauntedness, I propose that his poetry should be included in the cultural haunting genre. Xu suggests that Lee's "emphasis on memory indicates his belief that the past is never directly accessible to us, and that it is our narratives that conjure up the memory about our past" (142). Lee's poem "Furious Versions" states, "the past / doesn't fall away, the past / joins the greater / telling, and is. / At times its theme seems / murky, other times clear" (*City* 26). What is clear is that the reader witnesses what Lee struggles to understand, what haunts him. Lee's poetry tends "to be tacit, multiple, conflicting, or unfinished"; his identity is "established securely and transparently" through reflection and his own words (Brogan 18). Through self-

reflection, Lee understands the human experiences more entirely, and during this process, Lee does not avoid the haunting; he embraces it. By embracing the haunting, Lee becomes more vulnerable to the haunting, and this in turn allows for a "chance to know the self more fully than before" (Phillips 34). Through restless imagination, Lee creates art by carving up the past, all the while embracing his state of hauntedness. Doing so creates a space where his soul can be restored, and in the process, Lee opens himself up to become a little bit less haunted.

CONCLUSION

Cultural Haunting's Past and Future

Over the past decade, the cultural haunting genre has revolutionized how we think about cultural trauma and multicultural literature. Within this space, ghosts tell their story, allowing the reader to understand the haunting and the trauma while reconstructing an ethnic identity for those who suffered at the hands of others. These ghosts, like LeAnne Howe's Chowan spirit Ezol Day, have given a voice for those who have been muffled throughout history. These ghosts have, in the process, reconstructed a more accurate picture of the world we live in. However, ghosts in narratives of cultural haunting do not always serve the same function as Ezol Day does in Howe's *Miko Kings*, and it has become increasingly valuable to interpret the true message different ghosts are trying to convey. As witnessed in Monique Truong's *Bitter in the Mouth*, the ghosts of North Carolina's past do not help resolve Linda's state of hauntedness but instead show this "void" the characters live in and how being labeled as "other" within one own culture continues from one generation to the next. With that said, multicultural literature contains not only the voices of the haunting ghosts, but it also includes many other haunted and traumatized voices. For this reason, I proposed over this thesis that these haunting narratives should be considered as a cultural haunting.

With all these voices, there is a need to interpret and hear all of the haunted. Avery Gordon implies if a person is being haunted, it draws the person in, sometimes against their "will and always a bit magically, into the structure of feeling of a reality we come to experience, not as cold knowledge, but as a transformative recognition" (*Ghostly Matters* 8). Writer and poet Carl Phillips claims that we all are "uniquely haunted" and everything "for better *and* worse," "nevertheless refuses" "to go away" (65). The works of LeAnne Howe, Li-Young Lee, and

Monique Truong all show this type of cultural haunting and why it is crucial to listen to the character's or writer's haunting message. Gordon proposes that the "haunting always registers the harm inflicted or the loss sustained by a social violence done in the past or being done in the present and is for this reason quite frightening" ("Some Thoughts on Haunting and Futurity" 2). These frightening memories haunt authors of multicultural background, driving them to bring the haunting under their control and come to terms with the haunting.

As seen over this thesis, at the heart of the haunting is a writer's need to come to terms with the haunting, vanquishing these traumatic memories, and the thing that continues to haunt them. This state of hauntedness inspires writers to tell their side of the story and find a means to understand the haunting more clearly. In some cases, this testimony shows the writer's struggle to understand their own state of hauntedness, ethnicity, and possibly their own traumatic experiences. Gordon states that "trauma is a deeply regressive and repressive state—an awful predicament for both individuals and societies—a fatalistic and aberrant condition because [it is] seemingly interminable" ("Some Thoughts on Haunting and Futurity" 4). Visser concurs, stating that these traumatic experiences create a space that promotes "the recurrence or repetition of the stressor event through memory, dreams, narrative and/or various symptoms known under the definition of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)" (272). Individuals struggle to move past this type of haunting. Only when a writer or individual conjures up the haunting can a space be opened for the healing to happen and for the effect of the haunting on an individual or society be diminished.

This research project reviewed works from minority US literature. However, it should be noted that cultural haunting is not limited to that area of the world. It transcends borders and cultures and can be seen within African literature as well. For example, in Tsitsi Dangarembga's

Nervous Conditions (1988), despite the absence of such haunting ghosts as defined by Brogan and Gordon, the cultural haunting comes from Dangarembga's narrative itself and how she describes the traumatic experiences of two young girls Tambu and Nyasha, who are cousins that are close to each other. Within this novel, Nyasha is traumatized by her past experiences due to the effect of colonial rule over Zimbabwe, and her trauma is further compounded by the abuse she receives from her father, Babamukuru. Lucia Castro proposes that Nyasha's character "typifies the tormented subject who dares to doubt and defy the authority of colonial rule, incarnated in her father" (204). Castro goes on to propose that Nyasha's character tragically exposes the "utmost failure of the civilisational mission of colonization, which attests to its violence toward and destruction of other civilisations and modes of living" (204). By the end of the novel, Nyasha and Tambu have gone in separate directions. This leaves Nyasha within an oppressive environment towards women and leaves Nyasha without anyone to talk to about the trauma. Nyasha's traumatic experiences and her state of hauntedness becomes too much for her to handle, leading her to have multiple breakdowns and forcing her parents to seek a psychiatrist to help her condition. Dangarembga's narrative shows how traumatized someone can become by racial and gender oppression, how important it is to address the haunting, and most importantly, how critical it is to seek medical attention if the haunting becomes more than the person can handle.

In expanding the cultural haunting genre to include all the haunting and the haunted, it should be noted how it can be an often impossible task to separate a culturally-based trauma and what could be considered an individual based trauma. The death of a loved one is often considered an individual-based trauma, but as Lee's work shows the reader, this state of hauntedness drove him to reflect on his father's memories and then his own ethnicity. Lee's

narrative demonstrates how many individual based traumas can be directly or indirectly linked to culturally-based trauma and how important it is to consider this connection. Howe's, Lee's, and Truong's narratives analyzed within this thesis show the need to tie the haunting back to the cultural traumas experienced by those characters or writers. In some cases, this line can become blurred and as scholars expand to include all the cultural haunting, it is critical for them not to diminish the haunting and their powerful narratives.

Over this thesis, I suggested that cultural haunting should be expanded to include all of the haunting and how the poetry genre can show the same elements as defined by Brogan and Gordon. Future studies within the cultural haunting genre should continue to search for the cultural haunting throughout the world's literature, including those that don't necessary contain ghosts as outlined by Brogan and Gordon. As Dangarembga's novel shows, these types of cultural hauntings are not limited to North America but instead transcend borders, walls built to keep others out, oceans, and geographic separation. Only then can humanity get to the heart of our world's "discourse about multiculturalism", ethnic identity, and trauma experiences that these narratives convey (Brogan 4).

Multicultural literature often shows how history repeats itself, and each of the narratives studied in this thesis reveals how the past appears in the present. The cultural haunting genre gives a voice back to those that have been oppressed and muffled throughout history. These traumatic and haunting narratives allow the reader to see the world's history as unequally haunted yet interconnected. As a way to right these wrongs, authors like Howe, Truong, and Lee use this reflection and creation process to deal with haunting, and it is through this process that they may find some sense of clarity. This process opens up a way to understand their pain and what caused their state of hauntedness, conjures up those haunting memories, and provides a

more accurate picture of the world around which we live in. Keeping stories about traumatic memories and events circulating, Howe, Lee, and Truong raise their narratives to the level of mass consciousness. By doing this, they provide a space where readers can hear all the haunting, and in this process, they help change history's vicious cycle.

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